CHAPTER I

SOCIAL FORMATION

HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS
The dawn of history in Tamilakam is marked by the diffusion of iron using people of the Black and Red Ware tradition, the antiquity of which goes back to the 7th century B.C.\(^1\) It has been assumed that by this time Tamilakam had acquired some kind of linguistic identity and cultural homogeneity.\(^2\) However, its existence as the zone of the old Tamil language and culture by the 3rd century B.C., is well attested by the Tamil Brāhmi labels and the ancient Tamil literature. The frontiers of the Mauryan empire coincide with the linguistic limits of Tamilakam. The Tamil consciousness was a strong factor of cultural integration in the region and nothing alien entered into it without being transformed in a way suitable to its peculiar environment. The Tamil Brāhmi script itself is a clear example of such a process of adaptation characteristic to it. However, Tamilakam was never a uniform physiographic or ecological entity. It comprised mountainous areas, arid and semi-arid parts, the grass lands, the riverine plains and littoral fringes. As the geo-ecological setting varied from place to place the mode of human adaptation to it also varied. Naturally, life in Tamilakam happened to be a combination of diverse levels of material


2. The spread of Dravidian language and the diffusion of the Black and Red Ware are viewed often interconnected. See Haimendcrf, C.V.F. "When How and Where from did the Dravidians Come"? Indo-Asian Culture (1954) pp.238 ff. Also Sjoberg, A. "Who are the Dravidians"? in Sjoberg ed. Symposium on Dravidian Civilisation (New York, 1971). Both of them consider that the diffusion of the Dravidian language was complete by the end of the 5th century B.C.
culture engendered by the diverse modes of material appropriation of nature. Thus the region under review had a complex material milieu representing an uneven development over-arched by a common linguistic culture. Probing into the components of the material matrix and social premises of ancient Tamilakam, an attempt is made here to understand the processes of its early socio-economic formation.

The burial relics of the iron-using people of the Black and Red Wara tradition are the most ancient source for reconstructing the material environment of the early phase of life in Tamilakam. The grave goods of the period point to a primarily hunting and food gathering society which was gradually shifting to sedentary agriculture. The grave goods are dominated by spears, swords, tanged daggers, wedge-shaped blades, barbed arrow-heads and horse-fittings, which are the artifacts of hunting, warring nomads. But sickle and hoe are also recovered from certain graves which show the practice of agriculture. It has been argued that they knew the techniques of irrigation and led a sedentary life which is however, not unlikely in a later phase of their culture.


2. Sickle and socketed spades are found in a few 'circles' and 'burrows' of the Nilgiri hills. See Congreve, H. "The Antiquities of the Neilgherry Hills Including an Inquiry into the Descent of the Thautwars or Todars", op. cit., p. 77. Adichchanallur finds include iron hoes. See Balakrishnan Nair, op. cit., pp. 144, 147, 164, 168-170, 173 & 176.

excavated settlements of these people are very few, those sites already subjected to serious studies show that their agrarian life was hardly beyond the stage of subsistence farming. Nevertheless, their craftsmen-industry had produced a variety of artifacts. The manifold iron objects; pottery types; beads of gold, silver, copper horn blende, bone, glass, terracotta and semi-precious stones; gold diadems and so on indicate specialisation of the crafts. As most of the raw materials were not locally available in all parts some sort of exchange system must have been in vogue. Copper, tin, arsenic etc., must have reached them from distant places. The numerous types of their burial monuments exhibit the level of the construction technology and the standard of tools of the period. All the laterite monuments of the time are well chiselled whereas the granite works are invariably unchiselled. It would suggest that their techniques of iron casting were too poor to prepare tools strong enough to work on granite. The various iron objects of the time also show that they were all made of poorly tempered metal. However, the presence of bronze in a few sites suggests their knowledge of alloy metallurgy. In short the material environment of contemporary life points to a tribal setting with a rudimentary specialisation of crafts and exchange.

1. Exchange relations were common from the late stone age onwards. See Sahlins, M. Stone Age Economics (Chicago, 1972).

The Tamil Brāhmi cave labels belonging to the period from the third to the first centuries B.C., indicate a slightly developed phase. By this time several small pockets of agrarian settlements had come into being as āra. The craftsmen industries and the modes of the circulation of their products now involved more specialisation. The labels allude to the specialised traders such as pon-vānikan (dealer in gold), aruvai-vānikan (dealer in cotton fabrics), kolu-vānikan (dealer in iron goods), uppu-vānikan (dealer in salt) and panita-vānikan (dealer in sugar or toddy). Specialised craftsman like pon-kolavan (goldsmith) also figures in one of the labels. One of the labels by referring to the nikamattör (members of nigamam, corporation) of Veliyarai suggests the existence of certain traders as a corporate body. The distribution of the cavern sites shows the network of trade routes and certain pockets of agrarian settlements. Out of the fifteen cavern sites, ten are on the routes from Madurai to the neighbouring points of exchange, with a concentration in the north-east on the routes to Tiruchchirappalli. The caves are all on the top or at the foot of the rocky hillocks catching the attention of the wayfarers from a distance itself. The caves were

1. A label of Kongarpuliyankulam refers to Pākanur and another of Pugalur, to a nādu. See Mahadevan, "Corpus..." Nos. 12 & 17
2. Ibid., Nos. 5, 8, 9, 14 & 66.
3. Ibid., No. 1.
4. Ibid., No. 6.
5. See discussion under "Sources, Historiography and Method". Supra. P. 20
the dwelling places (palli or urai) of the Jain and Buddhist monks who were obviously dependent on the local agrarian settlements and the wayfarers, especially the merchants, as mendicants. The ruling chiefs and specialised merchants were their major patrons. The labels point to the gradual development of new religious life in certain parts of Tamilakam. Usages of loan words like atittānam, dharmam etc., indicate the influence of Pali, the dialect of the heterodox religions. It is clear that now the settlements were responding to one another through ascriptive and customary exchanges which was the basis of integration during the period. However, the information we derive from the labels are too limited and specialised to provide enough data for understanding the processes of social formation during the period.

The anthological literature is a veritable mine of information about the ideas institutions, customs and relationships of contemporary society. Of the existing corpus of anthologies the Ettuttokai collection excluding Kalittokai and Karipatul is considered to be the most archaic, belonging to about the second century B.C., to the third century A.D. A close review of these anthologies help us formulate some concepts about the processes of social formation and

1. Mahadevan, "Tamil Brāhmi Inscriptions" Tamil Nadu (State Department of Archaeology, 1970) p.14

2. See the discussion of the chronology of the anthological literature under "Sources, Historiography and Method". Supra, p.7 and n.3
the material forces behind them. An exhaustive tabulation of all the aspects of the life reflected in the extant corpus of anthological literature is not within the scope of the present study. Those allusions which are relevant to the discussion of social formation in ancient Tamilakam alone are reviewed here.

The most significant concept in the poetic tradition of anthologies which deserves to be reviewed first is that of the tinais. The tinais concept which is a reflection of the peculiar geo-ecological setting and the modes of human adaptation to it in Tamilakam, provides an intelligible beginning point for the study of contemporary socio-economic premises. The concept involves a physiographic division of Tamilakam into five tinais, viz., kurinji (hilly back-woods), palai (the parched zone), mullai (the pastures), marutam (the wet-land of agriculture) and neital (the sea coast). The existing physiographic features of the region illustrate that this five-fold division was a reflection of the reality and never a mere poetic convention. Some historians tried to discern a pattern of social evolution in the five-fold division and debated on the actual order of the five tinais. Since there is clear evidence of uneven development the question of unilinear evolution or any sequential order of development for this period does not arise. There is no rigidity in

1. Srinivasa Iyengar, P.T. History of the Tamils, op.cit., p.68
the poetic concept of the tinais with regard to its division of the geo-ecological environment. It was conceived so realistically that the overlapping disposition of the tinais formed part of the concept. Its exegesis is simple and involves no symbolism. They are just the five-fold division of man-nature situations in the anthropological as well as the physiographical context. To us the classification of land and nature involved in the concept and its allusions to the social adaptations of peoples alone are relevant.

Firstly, it gives a clear picture of five types of terrain, i.e., the hilly backwoods (kūriṅji) the parched zones (pālai) the pastures (mullai), the agrarian wet-lands (marutam) and the sea coast (neital). Secondly, it informs us of the various peoples adapted to each tinaí, viz., the kānavar and vētar of the kūriṅji; the evinar, maravar and kāḷar of the pālai; the āvar, idaiyar and kuravar of the mullai; the tōlūvar and ulavar of the marutam and the paratavar, mīnavar, valavar and umanar of the neital. Thirdly, it refers to the respective economies of each tinaí, viz., the hunting and food-gathering of the kūriṅji; the plundering and cattle lifting of the pālai; the stock rearing and shifting agriculture of the mullai; the commodity production and plough agriculture in the marutam; and the fishing and salt manufacturing of the neital. This was never a rigid compartmentalisation as is implied by the concept of tinaimavakkam, the merging and

1. See the concept of tinaimavakkam which deals with the overlapping of the tinais. Subrahmanian, N. Pre-Pallavan Tamil Index; Index of Historical Material in Pre-Pallavan Tamil Literature, (Madras, 1966).
overlapping of the tinais. Both kurinji and mullai had cultivable slopes called punam or ēnal which enabled the kanavar and vētar to take to shifting agriculture as the kuravar. Poem 159 of Purannāṟṟṟu (Pn) has an allusion to the vētar of Kollimalai doing the slash and burn agriculture. Pn. 231 alludes to the kuravar of Kollainilam doing the slash and burn operation, probably for cultivation. Pn.168 has an imagery alluding to the millet cultivation of Kutiramalai slopes by the kuravar. Narrinai (Nar) 266 and 289 refer to shifting cultivation of mullai. Interdependence of the peoples of the tinais is also clear from various poems.

Apart from the above five-fold divisions of physiographic nature they had a further broad agrarian classification of land into vanpulam (the miscellaneous non-agrarian region) and menpulam (the purely agrarian wet lands, i.e. the marutam region). Vanpulam included all the hill slopes, arid plains and pastures obviously quite larger than menpulam which was exclusively the superior fertile plains of paddy


2. Nar. 142; 303; 331; 372; 388; 45; 175; Ainkurunāṟṟṟu (Aink) 47; 48; 195; 111; Akanāṟṟṟu (An) 60; 65; 10; Pn.33 are some of the examples showing the material interdependence of the tinais. This has not been considered while describing the uneven development of the tinais in Sivathamby, K., "Early South Indian Society and Economy: The Tinal Concept", Social Scientist, No.29 (1974) pp 20-37. Evidences for the interdependence of the tinais are incidentally referred to in his, "An Analysis of the Anthropological significance of the Economic Activities and Conduct Code Ascribed to Mullai-tinal", Ist ICCS, Kaulalumpur (1976) pp 320 ff. Also see Alexander M. Dubianski, "An Analysis of the Mullai-Palai Fragment of Ancient Tamil Poetry," JTS; No.17 (1980) pp 88 ff. A general review of the interdependent material culture of the period is made in Singaravelu, S. Social Life of the Tamils: Classical Period (Kaulalumpur, 1966) pp.32 ff.
cultivation. Cultivable slopes and the semi-arid plains of
vannale in were called puna and onal respectively where millet and
green grain 2 as shown earlier the vëgor and koyam were the
cultivating close in vannale along with whom consisted the
livestock-keepers; ploughers and cattle-lifters; the magico-religious
functions like ngiya, nan, ngiyen and kataon and a
large number of other dependents. 2 Being inhabited by the close of
such diverse ways of life, the material milieu of vannale was a
combination of wild food economy, cattle keeping and subsistence
farming.

The material matrix of vannale was one of plough agriculture
with the required arts and crafts. Ungu and toguw were the
tillers of vannale. They knew the technique of harnessing the
bullocks (grute) at their necks with a cross-bar (nukra) to a plough
share (pali or pali), obviously iron-tipped for furrowing. 3 Buffal-
locos (grume) were also used for ploughing. 4 Tank irrigation (ewen)

1. Anka, 265: 1; 283: 2; 292: 4; 296: 1; curupukai (Ragui)
5: 2; 72: 4; 391: 1; 377: 5; 360: 5; Har., 119: 1; 102: 9; 103: 1;
125: 2; 150: 6; 200: 4; 259: 10; 336: 2; 360: 2; 386: 3; 396: 6;
13: 7; En. 28: 1; An. 1: 6; 32: 1; 73: 16; 82: 13; 118: 12; 132: 1;
130: 10; 192: 16; 280: 5. The semi-arid lands were called pun-

2. Pn. 335 The magico-religious association of such groups is
referred to in Hart 06, cit., p 46.

3. The imagery in curupukai - buki is gone in Pn., illustrates
contemporary art of ploughing. An., 62: 5; 161: 5; 226: 4;
350: 6; Pn., 102: 1; 179: 9; 191: 11; 20: 11; 60: 1; 56: 1; 136: 9;
303: 11; 322: 1.

4. An. 56: 1; 92: 15; ecc. 
and bund (cirai) construction for ensuring the availability of water for irrigating agriculture were in vogue. Animal and man powers were utilised for irrigation works as well as other agrarian jobs like threshing, pounding etc. With the given technology of production mempulam must have produced enough surplus to support the artisans and craftsmen engaged in works directly or indirectly related to farming. Anthologies refer to spinning, weaving and metal-smelting people. The various artisans and craftsmen are indicative of a social division of labour. There were uvarndör (high born) and ilipirappālar (low born), among the people. The settlements of the low born are referred to as paraccēri. The varna


2. Pn.125 alludes to women engaged in spinning. Nar.353 also refers to spinning as a work of the women folk. Pn.170 and 312 besides Akanānūru (An.) 96 refer to iron-smelting people and their devices. Pn.180 has a direct allusion to a blacksmith. A leather-worker figures in Pn.82 and potters in a few poems like that under Pn.256.

3. The concept is used here in a liberal sense to mean only a relative specialisation of certain groups. It has been argued that the concept in its scientific sense applies only to societies founded on a market economy. See Claude Meillasoull, "Are there Castes in India? Economy and Society, vol.2 (1973) p. 91

4. Uvarndör are referred to in this sense only in later works. It is to mean gods in Pn.213, 362 etc., and in Prp.9:9 1,11. Pn 221 seems to refer to brahmanas with the term. Prp. 3:9 1,35 uses the term uvarndör for brahmana. Ilipitappālar or ilisinar occur in Pn. 170:5; 82:3, 287:2, 289:10; & 363:14. Logically the latter do not exist without the former.

5. An. 15:17; 65:4; 76:2; 110:2; 115:4; 140:4; 216:16; 220:1; 276:7; 347:6; 383:2; 386:11; Aink. 279:5; Kuru. 262:1; Nar. 63:3; 77:8; 145:9; 150:7; 171:4; 175:7; 249:9; 331:12; & 342:4.
concept appears to be quite familiar to the poets of the time. The separate identity of the brahmanas officiating Vedic sacrifices is clear from the various allusions in the poems of Pn. However, in actual practice the varna system as such does not seem to have functioned since it hardly shows a reflection of the reality. There is no doubt that the brahmanas enjoyed the highest socio-ritual status in relation to which the status of the other people was graded hierarchically.

The surplus of menpulam was shared by a large group of dependents, mostly the non-producing peoples of vanpulam. Some people as beggars (iravar), a few as looters (källar) and others like pânar, paraîyar, tuçiyar and katampar as magico-religious functionaries, depended on menpulam. All who had something to exchange; the subsistence farmers with their hill products, the coastal people with their fish and salt, the live stock rearers with their dairy products came to menpulam to share its surplus. There are many allusions in the anthologies to the bullock-carts of umanar loaded with salt going

1. Pn. 183 makes a direct allusion to the varna concept by mentioning nárpāl. L.8. Ideas of marai, nàrmarai, etc., frequently occur in various other songs of Pn. See 1:6 (marchinávilantapar); 6:20 (nàrmarai munivar); 26:13 (nàrmarai); 362: 8-9. The concept of twice born is alluded to in 367:12 (irupirappālar). In the same poem we find the concept of agnitārava referred to as muttee (L.13).

2. Pn. 1:6; 2:18; (nälvetaneri); 6:20; 9:1 (pāropananakkal) 34:3; 126:11; 200:13; 201:7; 361:4; and so on. 166:12 refers to pūn ān (sacred thread). The differentiation between the brahmanas is often made by referring to the terms mārpāl (the higher group) and kilpāl (the lower group). See Pn.183:9-10.
to the points of exchanges in the interior, obviously menpolam. In short menpolam was the nerve centre of contemporary economic life.

It seems that reciprocity was the dominant mode of exchange. Salt and paddy were the leading commodities in relation to which the inter-commodity exchange rates were established. Profit oriented exchanges are not referred to in the anthologies in the context of hinterland transactions. We hear about the loan of a fixed commodity to be paid back in the same kind and quantity, known as kurittumäretirppai or kurityetirppai from Pn. 333. Market places like ävānam and angāti are mentioned in the poems. Certain weights and measures were in vogue. Weights of gold known as kānam and kālēnju were used as medium in higher transactions. Kacu is mentioned in the literature and probably for the gold coins brought to Tamilakam by the transmarine merchants.

There was no convenient or safe infra-structure in the hinterlands. Pn. 102 refers to umanar's bullock-carts loaded with salt moving through undulated marshy routes and their difficulties in retrieving the wheels of their carts clauged in mire. Human settle-

1. An. 37:16; Kuru. 117:4; 388:4; Nar., 125:9; 198:9; 315:4; Prp. 27:13; Pn. 102:1; 289:2; 327:1; 370:16.
2. An. 93:10; Prp. 68:10. Ävānam is the Tamil form of īpānam, a Prakrit-Sanskrit word for market place.
3. Prp. 32:7-9; 92:21 & 61; Pn. 189:11-12.
5. Kuru., 67; Nar., 274.
ments were sparsely distributed without proper interconnecting paths. So generally all kinds of exchanges and interdependence were confined to settlements of small neighbouring localities.

Commanding the resources of both vanpulam and menpulam there were Mūvēndar, the three principal ruling lineages - the Čēras, the Cōlas and the Pandyas - and the lineages of minor chieftains such as the Vēlír, Kurunilamannar, and Cirūrmannar, each one having his own sphere of influence. They all embodied their respective clans and by virtue of which enjoyed the prerogative of commanding the resources of their clans. Pn.49 would have us assume that the chieftain who held vanpulam tracts were called nāṇan; who held menpulam tracts as uran; and who held coastal tracts as cēṟṟpaṇ. The chieftains had the right to give away the resources at their disposal to their bards, beloveds and dependents as gifts (koḍai). Anthologies show that gift giving (koḍaimai) was the most important responsibility of the chieftains and all songs therefore are in praise of the act of gift giving.

The recipients of gifts were the scholarly bards (pulavar) warrior-chiefs, the lesser bards (ṁāṇar), and other dependents who moved around the big and small ruling lineages. Pulavar received gifts of gold, land, chariots and elephants from the principal ruling lineages (Mūvēndar) and other powerful chieftains. Warrior-chiefs received primarily land as gifts for their services in wars

1. Pn. 3 is a representative example.
of the Mūvēndar. The lesser bards sang in praise of anybody who could give something to them. Often the scholarly bards themselves were depended upon by them. Pn. 376, 382, 396 and 400 are some of the poems expressive of the acute poverty of the lesser bards. Pn. 392 and 393 show how badly dressed a pāna was. Pn. 139 portrays the miserable lot of a virali, the woman of the pāna folk. There are many allusions to the poverty of minor chieftains who were depended upon by the lesser bards. Pn. 127, 327, to 331 and 333 are some of the poems displaying the resource scarcity of the minor chieftains. Interestingly all these chieftains are those commanding tracts in vannulam. Poets speak of their nobility of giving away as gifts even the small quantity of millet reserved for sowing. Though this appears to be a stock expression of the poets, it occurs only in poems praising the chieftains of vannulam.

The chieftains who held mempulam tracts were comparatively more affluent. Their large paddy fields and huge stock of paddy are alluded to in the anthologies. Pn. 353 speaks of a chieftains 'hill like' paddy heaps. Pn. 376 praises Oymēn's paddy fields and the grain heaped in his courtyard. Pn. 391 refers to the sky-scraper paddy heaps of the kilān of Poraiyārrur. Pn. 395 praises Titten's paddy fields. Pn. 396 alludes to the large paddy fields and huge paddy heaps of

1. At times the bards seem to have used virali who would sing and dance, for securing gifts from the chieftains. Pn.109. She functioned as a courtesan of later period. See Kersenboon story, "virali" Possible sources of the Dēvādāsi Tradition in the Tamil Bardic period", J.T.S., No.19 (1981) pp 19 ff.
Elini Atan of Veṭṭāru. All these huge stocks of grain are said to have been lavished as gifts to bards and other dependents.

Gift giving was the institution through which contemporary society had its resources redistributed. But it is a resource-exhausting institution unless constantly replenished through some stable means. It is clear that all the chieftains could not have persisted in giving gifts out of what his lands produced alone. The chieftains of non-agrarian tracts were easily exhausted of his resources as shown elsewhere. In Pn. 160 we have an interesting allusion to an impoverished chieftain of vanamulam in his all-exhausted state calling his black-smith to make a good spear for plundering in order to satisfy the needs of his dependents. All the chieftains had to resort to plundering as an alternative to replenish them with resources for gift-giving. Plunder-raids were in fact, the instituted means for pooling the resources under the authority of a chieftain and re-distribute them in the form of gifts.


2. Numerous are the examples illustrating the plunder-gift continuum in the cattle raid songs in Pn. See an analysis of the problem in Narayanan, M.G.S. "Cattle raiders of the Sangam Age", IHC, (Bhuvaneswar, 1977).

Plundering wars being fundamental to the maintenance of contemporary economy, all ideas and institutions in the broad superstructure helped the plunder-based redistribution function effectively. The ideas such as 'war beget the chieftain'; 'martyres join damsels in the heaven'; war is the traditional inspiration of maravar', 'martial bravery of the sons is the passion of motherhood'; cowardice is ignominous' and so on, glorify wars and all sorts of involvement in wars. Their totems, musical instruments, songs and dances were all magical and symbolic, capable of stimulating active involvement in wars. Their ethics (aram) justified wars and plunders. Everything in the society revolved round the plunder - wars and everything was disposed of so as to achieve victory in them. Poetic concepts like vetai (cattle raid), karantai (cattle recovering war), vañi (chieftains attack of a territory), kañi (defending war), and tumpai (getting ready for war) in the puram poems clearly illustrate how institutionalised the wars were in contemporary society. Martial rejoicing was their chief amusement as we find in the institutions like vakai (the enthusiastic killing of enemies with clamours), untatu (social dining and drinking before and after wars), perumcörvilavu (grand rice feast), and cirucörvilavu (small rice feast). Certain turaiś of Pn. songs are explicit in their idealisation of war and its leaders. Uvakaikkalulcci turai songs in Pn. poetises a wife's bursting into

1. Hart. _op. cit._, p. 44.
tears in happiness at the sight of her husband with many wounds by the sword. Mutinmullai turai songs in Pn. idealises the women folk of the maravar as brave as their warrior husbands. Songs under Kuṭhinilavuṟaital turai, ēṟaṁmullai turai and vallāṁmullai turai of Pn. are examples of the idealisation of the tradition and lineages of the warrior chiefs. Centuraippaṭṭaṇ-pāṭṭu of patirruppattu (Prp) is poem in praise of the warrior hero's fame, might, mien and glory. Vaṅcitturaippaṭṭaṇ-pāṭṭu of Prp. is poem in praise of invading warriors. In short the ethos of war dominated every aspect of contemporary society.

War was a menace to the cultivators. Malapulavanāţi turai songs in Pn. are full of allusions to the destruction of cultivated fields (kalani or paḷanam) and settlements. Setting fire (eriparandēṭṭaḷ) on crop-fields and settlements is often alluded to as an inevitable part of plunder-wars. Pāṇḍaran kaṇṇanār while praising Coḷan Perunār Kili, alludes to the latters burning of enemy's merutam tracts which knew no forest other than that of sugar-cane, in Pn.16. Kārikkaṇṇanār while praising Pandyan Nan-māran incidentaly refers to the setting ablaze of crop-fields as a common atrocity of plunder-war, in Pn. 57. In a song of Neṭṭimaiyār (Pn. 15) the destruction of crop-fields by the stamping of rough-riden horses harnessed to war chariots, is alluded to as a noble attribute of Pandyan Mudukuṟumi. There is a reference by Kallāḍanār in Pn.23 to the plundering of crops as much as possible and the destruction of the remaining crops as well as the land.
It is clear that the plunder-wars often aimed at the acquisition of productive lands. The main motivation of the warrior-chiefs in the participation of the major wars led by the principal ruling lineages appears to be the reward in the form of land. Pn. 297 describes a warrior chief discussing with his fellow warrior chiefs assembled for an untāṭtu before the ensuing vetcci, that he would not accept the arid gram-growing tracts as reward for fighting, but only paddy growing marutam. Vetcci being a cattle raid, here the implication is not the redistribution of acquired lands as reward, but most probably the lands in the rewarder's possession. However, there are allusions to the acquisition of productive lands through wars, as exemplified by Pn. 24. In this poem Miḷālaṇ and Muttur, two villages of fertile wet-lands are mentioned to have been acquired by Pandyan Neṇuṇjelīyan from Evvi, a vēḻ chief, obviously through war. Redistribution of land, whether acquired or otherwise, was a regular phenomena since war chiefs were to be rewarded with land after every war and war was imminent to contemporary material matrix.

It appears that the cultivators were neither warriors by themselves, nor were they offered sufficient protection by the chieftains. The helplessness of the passive cultivators is beautifully declimate in Pn. 20 by Kuṟumkōliyur Kiḷār. He says that 'the cultivators knew no weapon other than plough; they knew no bow other than the rain bow'.

1. All the evidences in Pn. for the practice are discussed in Narayanan, M.G.S., "The Warrior Settlements in the Sangam Age" IHC (Kurukshetra, 1982).
The body of warriors being raised only on demand, there was no means for a permanent defence in a locality. Responding to the beating of magico-religious war-drums the marava fighters gathered for vetccol or karantai, vanji or kani; and so on. They strengthened their bond of loyalty to the chieftain through the group-dining and drinking (corru-vilavu and unattu) with him. They took a pledge of loyalty (neyumoli punattal) in such gatherings of drinking and dining. (The chieftain with his own hands gave drinks to the warrior-chiefs and honoured them) The bards invigorated them with their songs of kutinilaituraittal turai, eran mullai turai, vallan mullai turai, centurai and vañcitturai containing praises of their warrior tradition, might and mien.

Anthologies are not without allusions to ideas against war. Some of the poems of porumolik-kani turai, Ceviyarivuru turai, Mutumolik-kani turai and parppanavakai turai in Pn. contain anti-war sentiments. All the poems which cherish peace are interestingly those that stress the significance of agriculture. They all exhort the chieftain to maintain peace and help the growth of agriculture. Paddy is said to be the basis of a chieftain's power and the protection of the tillers his chief responsibility. But it appears that the ideology of peace which had relevance only to menpulam could hardly be effective since the general material milieu had to maintain war as an economic necessity.

The period witnessed the rise and fall of the transmarine trade relations apart from the inland exchange relations which were conti-
ning during the Nanda and Maurya periods. Some of the punch
marked coins are believed to be of this period. Megasthenes all-
udes to the trade between Pāṭalīputra and the Pandya area.
Kautilya also refers to it. ¹ Ph. songs allude to the Yavana ships
arriving at the Cēra port of Muziris.² Several hoards of Roman
coins belonging to the first century B.C., to the fourth century A.D,
suggest the transmarine contacts in varying intensities throughout
the period. The accounts left by the ancient geographers such as
Pliny, the author of Periplus Maris Erithraei and Ptolemy give us
a good idea about the trade and markets of the time.

Pliny mentions Modura as the hinterland market centre and Coṭṭa-
nara and Nelcyṇḍon as the ports.³ The author of the Periplus speaks
of Nauræ, Tyndis and Musiri as the main ports of Cērobōtttras and
Nelcyṇḍa, Comeri and Coľchis as those of the Pandyan.⁴ Coľchis was
noted by him for its pearl-fishery. He refers to the pearls worked
by the captives. He mentions Argāru as a hinterland market centre
where pearls were gathered and the cotton fabrics called Argāritic

¹. Mc Crindle, J.W. Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes
and Arrian. (Calcutta, 1877) p.63.

². Arthaśāstra (Shama Sastri ed.)(3rd edn.)

³. Ph.343.

⁴. Natural History. VI. 26 quoted in Mc Crindle, J.W. Ancient
India as Described in Classical Literature (rpt. Amsterdam,
1975) p.112.

exported. Camara, Poduca and Sopatma are the other ports mentioned by him. To the earlier list Ptolemy adds Khaberis and Melange on the east coast and Korura on the west among the major ports of Tamilakam. He also gives a big list of interior markets and a few seats of the ruling lineages of the time.

Aromatics, pepper, ginger, cardamom, cloves and such spices; wild fauna-goods including ivory; wild woods such as teak and sandal; cotton fabrics; precious stones; pearls, gems and iron formed the chief items of exports. Wine, copper, arsenic, tin and ceramics seem to have been brought by the transmarine traders to their colonies in Tamilakam. Pliny observes that these goods were purchased at a very low price and sold at hundred times higher prices in Rome, by the transmarine traders. He also refers to the great demand the oriental goods had in Rome. It is well known that the imports of oriental goods were so much that the Romans felt their gold draining away.

A Chinese record probably of the first century B.C. mention the import

1. Ibid., p. 307
2. Ibid., p. 366
3. Ibid., pp. 376-77
5. Mc Crindle, op. cit., pp 30-32
6. Pliny, Natural History vi - 26 He says, "...giving back her own wares, which are sold among us at a fully a hundred times their first cost".
of pearls, precious stones, wild goods, and cotton fabrics from the Kānchi region.

Excavations at the ports alluded to in the foreign accounts have corroborated transmarine contacts with the coasts of Tamiḻakam. Arikamēdu near Pondicherry, Nāṭṭamēdu near Karaikkādu, Kānchīpuram, and Korkai have yielded some cultural relics of foreigners as well as native goods. References to Korkai as a pearl market have been substantiated by the discovery of many shells of pearl oyster there. So far the excavations have uncovered no evidence of urbanisation as some of the literary allusions would describe.

If we put all these information from the varied sources such as the burial relics of the iron using people of the Black and Red Ware tradition, the Tamil Brāhmī cave labels, the anthological literature, the accounts of the ancient geographers and the numismatic remains, it draws an intelligible configuration of contemporary socio-economic life. But generally the ancient history of the Tamils has been viewed in several facets such as Megalithic/Iron Age, the Sangam Age, the Kalabhra interregnum and so on in the South Indian historiography. Even while discussing the Sangam Age the corpus of Sangam literature has been used as a totality without seriously considering the need for distinctly placing them in a chronological frame work so as to show the different phases of development. The attempt here

2. IAR., 1964-65
3. Nar. 45; Maduraikkāṇci and Pattinappālai.
is to correlate all the information from these various sources in order to evolve a comprehensive picture of the processes of contemporary social formation.

The clues of the grave goods and anthologies indicate a wild food economy and subsistence farming, gradually getting dominated by wet-land rice cultivation. It appears that in the most archaic phase the techniques of production were in the level of metallic substitution of the neolithic tools rather than the stage innovating new tools. No actual plough tip, but only crude thrust hoes are seen among the tools of the graves goods. From the point of view of technology the manual pulling of a thrust-hoe is not much of an improvement upon the manual shoving of a digging stick. We do not know that the Koluvānikan of Alakarmalai was a dealer in plough-tips or the varied hoes. However, the wet-land agriculture referred to in anthologies knew the technique of ploughshare drawn by animal power.

The primitive economies of shifting cultivation and animal husbandry do not involve any kind of division of labour. But the ploughshare agriculture requires some form of specialisation of arts and crafts. Anthologies would have us believe that there was an emerging division of labour as well as the idea of a simple hierarchy. The idea of uvarndör (high born) and ilišinar (low born) which engenders from this division of labour, is significant. The

1. Actual plough-tips were recovered from the graves of Central India. Banerjee, op.cit., p.221.
2. Supra. n.p
division here is clearly between the controllers of resources and the ordinary clan members. However, the relations of production had not grown so complex as to break the clan-kinship ties completely, since the basis of production was largely the co-operative labour of the clans which consisted of affinal relatives.¹

The controllers of productive land were the warrior chiefs (including Vēḷir, and other mannar), the brahmanas, the merchants and some of the bards. Most of the pulavar must have possessed wealth including land by way of gifts. It appears that most of these land holders were the chiefs of clans. Originally the land must have belonged to the clans, but the chiefs as the embodiments of the kinship ties of clans could exercise control over it. Plundering one another's resources they redistributed the booty among their own dependents. The warrior chiefs were rewarded with land for their services in wars led by the ruling lineages². This implies change in the nuclei of contemporary organisation of production based on kinship. Break of kinship was inevitable in the case of the redistribution of land among the people outside the respective clans.


2. Pn. 287 & 297. See discussion on this in Narayanan, M.G.S. op.cit.
This was particularly true in the case of transfer of land to the brahmanas. This points to the processes of the disintegration of kinship and the gradual formation of households as the land owning units. In addition to the chiefly families of the clan several land owning house-holds began to emerge now through the redistribution of land. The poets who figure as kiläns were obviously land holders. These land holders are comparable to the gahapatis of Northern India.¹

The industry of the period was very much a part of the redistributive economy. Commodity production involved relation based on kinship. Merchants and dealers in specialised goods seem to be clan leaders. Circulation of resources were largely based on reciprocity. But the distribution of raw materials and certain finished goods was mainly through traders i.e. mercantile circulation. The presence of koluvänikan indicates that the circulation of the agrarian tools was mercantile. This would suggest that the specialised arts and crafts had not become obligatory and immobile. However, contemporary industry and commerce did not require any change in the existing division of labour based on kinship.

1. The emergence of the Gahapatis, their role in the agrarian organisation and social status etc., are discussed in Thapar, R. "State Formation in Early India" International Social Science Journal Vol.XXXII, No.4 (1980) p 558.
There is no evidence to show that the traders of Tamilakam had any significant role in contemporary transmarine commerce. Evidences are all for the coming of the foreign merchants. They were mostly of Abyssinia, Arabia, Persia and Rome, frequenting the wide range of exchange centres in the Asiatic coasts. The mention that the imports to Rome were so much and the Senate grew anxious over the drain of gold is often taken as indicative of an exodus of gold to India. But the observation of Pliny that traders sold Indian commodities in Rome hundred times higher than their original price suggests that the quantum of gold reached India was hundred times less than what the adventurous foreign traders got.

1. Prop., 2:6; Pn., 66 & 126; An., 152; Kur., 240 are cited as evidences for defending the allegation that the ancient Tamils were not active in foreign trade, in Kunhan Pillai, P.N. Annatte Keralam (Kottayam, rpt. 1970) pp. 52-3. The reference in Prop 2:6 is to the ships sailing for acquiring gold from foreign countries. Karikala Cōla is addressed in Pn.66 as born in the lineage of he who controlled the wind and set the ship on the vast ocean for sail. The reference in Pn. 126 is to the inability of others to enter the Western Sea where the Cēra ruler led his gold-giving ship. The allusion in An.152 is to the ships of Tittan Veliyan bringing gold. Kur.240 contains only an imagery that a sinking ship is like a mountain. He quotes a reference in Pliny also to an Indian ship which was carried by wind to the German coast. Ibid., p. 53. Recently excavation on the Red Sea coast yielded a pottery graffiti in Tamil Brahmi characters referring to two names, Caatan and Kanan probably two merchants from the Tamil coast.


From the Roman anxiety over the drain of gold it appears that the non-Romans among the merchant-middlemen were many and a big share of profit went to them rather than to Romans. Nevertheless, it is clear that most of the goods of Tamilakam were purchased by gold since her import requirements were limited. Roman wine jars and ceramics hardly seem to have been in use beyond the ports. The Egyptian imports such as tin, lead, arsenic and copper had only limited use as bronze making was rare.

The transmarine contacts also had no remarkable effect on the economy of Tamilakam just as her inland trade and markets. It hardly led to the growth of inland traders beyond clan ties and kinship, upon which contemporary manufacture and circulation depended. Native traders do not seem to have acted as middlemen between the foreign merchants and the local chieftains in transmarine commerce. Foreign merchants appear to have used the ports of Tamilakam to import goods from the south-eastern world with no participation of native traders as middlemen. It is natural that the degree of urbanisation was not remarkable under the set up. In the absence of a trading class of high order on equal footing with contemporary long distance traders

1. Maloney, op.cit., p. 29

2. Even with the highly developed trade, the degree of urbanization achieved by Rome during this period was not remarkable. See Polanyi, K., The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origin of our Time, (Boston, 1957) p 55.
or a competent class of merchant middlemen, one cannot argue for
the impact of foreign commerce on the society. We have seen that
diamonds, pearls and cotton fabrics were the export items of the
period the processing of which involved some amount of organised
labour. Who worked and controlled the mines is not known. We do
not know who organised the manufacture of cotton fabrics. Our sou-
resources do not clearly point to a consumer class which required goods
of 'sociotechnic' or 'ideotechnic' value rather than 'technomic'.
1 It
is obvious that the chiefly families which controlled the marutam
tracts were capable of acquiring 'ideotechnic' valuables. The chieftains
used these valuables as gifts for enriching their status and
social ranking. The Roman gold which reached the Tamil land circu-
lated as an 'ideotechnic' valuable. It could hardly do the function
of money since the material milieu was of prestations and gifts
rather than profit oriented exchanges.2

1. The expressions are borrowed from Binford, L. "Archae-
ology as Anthropology", in Binford, L. An Archaeologi-

2. Anthropologists theorise that profit oriented excha-
gen's are not likely in a society of kinship ties.
Relevant concepts are given in Sahlin, M.D. "On the
Sociology of Primitivo Exchange", in Banton, M. ed.
The Relevanco of Models for Social Anthropology
London, 1968) pp. 139ff. Also Dalton, G. "Karl Polanyi's
Analysis of Long Distance Trade and His Wider Paradigm",
in Sahloff, J. and Lamberg-Karlovsky eds. Ancient Civi-
lisation and Trade (Albuquerque, 1975) pp. 63ff. Einsig,
P. Primitive Money in its Ethnological, historical
It is anachronistic to associate scheduled foreign trade with the social formation of contemporary Tamilakam which had none of the pre-requisites essential for organising planned exchange relations with distant societies. Long distance trade was not the affair of an economy of clans and households but the activity of a society with surplus production, economic specialisation, multiplicity of crafts, a class of full time traders and above all a strong state system.¹ So there is no wonder that evidences for the conduct of foreign commerce by the Tamil south are absent. This being the situation there is no reason to associate the changes in the material matrix of Tamilakam with trade.²

In the field of production we have seen that wetland agriculture failed to expand beyond small localities of the river plains. Despite the availability of iron and the possession of its technology, advanced farming had only a snail-pace expansion in Tamilakam during the period. Was lack of population-pressure a cause? True,


3. It has been argued that population pressure was the motor of all significant changes in the history of the techniques of production. Boserup, E. Conditions of Agricultural Growth : The Economics of Agrarian Change Under Population Pressure (Aldine, 1965). Also Hayden, B. "Research and Development in the Stone Age : Technological Transitions Among Hunter-Gatherers", Current Anthropology (CA) vol.22, No.5 (1981). Hayden gives the "resource stress" model as an alternative to the model of "population pressure".
that a set up of incessant wars could hardly have promoted the
growth of population. But it is also true that a large number of
people lived on the surplus of the wet-lands without having any
involvement in the process of production. One has to look into the
peculiar material environment of ancient Tamilakam and its ideas
and institutions in order to explain the alleged slowness of agrarian expansion. The following factors have to be highlighted in
this context:

(a) Agrarian settlements of the period were small pockets
surrounded by large non-agrarian tracts of plunderers, and the
cultivators were poor defenders by themselves.

(b) Contemporary agriculture was largely based on the co-oper-
active labour of clans and for such an organisation of production it
was impossible to integrate the non-agrarian tracts.

(c) The chieftain who embodied the clan was a warrior leader
and not an effective organiser of production.

(d) The basis of the chieftain's power being loyalty of the
clan, there was little scope for coercion leading to better produ-
ction.

(e) The authority of the chieftain was directed to the centrali-
isation of resources and their redistribution.

(f) Plunder-war was the means to the replenishing of resources.

(g) War being fundamental to the maintenance of the redistribu-
tive economy of the time, its incessant operation affected production
and engaged large groups of people in non-productive functions.

Under these conditions the wet-land agriculture had little scope for expansion. However, through the institutions of gift-giving and redistribution, landed house-holds were increasing in number. The warrior leaders, kilāns, pulavar and other priestly and scholarly brahmanas who had already emerged as land controlling house-holds were adding to the contradictions involved in contemporary material culture. The brahmana house-holds had a distinctive feature in their organisation of production, i.e., the absence of kinship. Another, probably the most crucial, feature was status of brahmanas as non-cultivating land owners. This was crucial because this led to the formation of two mutually antagonistic classes—the landed organisers and the landless cultivators. However, there is no evidence for the emergence of intermediaries in the process of production under the brahmana house-holds during the days of the Anthologies. Excepting the poetic embellishments, most of the ideas and institutions mentioned in the Pattupāṭṭu collection are of the same material culture of the combination of house-hold and clan based productions. Poems such as Cirupāṇāṟṟuppattai, Mullaippattu, Kurinjiippattu and Perumpāṇāṟṟuppattai reflect the socio-economic milieu of the poems under the Ettuttokai collection.

The earliest record that shows the existence of intermediaries in the process of production is the rock inscription of Pulānkuṇicci,
which belongs to the early fifth century A.D. The record refers to the creation of a new settlement, probably a brahmana village, where certain brahmana land holders along with their kutis are brought and settled. It alludes to the miyāṭci (overlordship) of the brahmāṇḍya-kilavar over land and the kārāṇ-kilamai (the subordinate rights of the settlers). The share holding right of the brahmāṇḍya-kilavar is referred to as brahmāṇḍya-kilamai. They are called in the record as kuḍumbiyar. The record mentions nīr-nilam (wet-land), puṇcey (dry land) and tōttam (garden land). The land relations indicated by the record are that of a developed one and hardly the set up revealed in the anthologies. The date of this inscription is a controversial problem. The well developed land rights and other institutions alluded to in the record point to a period in no way earlier than the fifth century A.D. Palaeography would also support this dating. To know the transitional stages one has to check the literary sources. Archaeological and numismatic materials are quite marginal.

1. Nagaswamy, R. op.cit.

2. Nagaswamy's reading has been improved by Raghava Varier and Subbarayalu. The facts given here are borrowed from discussions from them and personal observation of the site and the estampages.


4. Ibid. See discussion under "Sources, Historiography and Method" p.22. n.3
Brahmadeya villages are not alluded to in the actual text of the anthologies. But their colophons which are of a relatively later date do refer to pirammataya. Like the pulankuricci record the colophons also use the term pirammataya, possibly due to the fact that they belong more or less to the same period.

The Kilaanakku works and Tolkappiyam which belong to about the fifth-sixth centuries A.D. contain clues to the growth of wetland agriculture. There is an unprecedented stress on peace and agriculture in these works. Out of the eighteen Kilaanakku works eleven are ethical didactics. They all exhort good conduct and active involvement in agriculture and condemn idleness. All the dependents on agriculturists as iravar (beggars) or kallar (looters) are ruthlessly accused. To the tillers the Kilaanakku ethics reiterates in strong words to work hard and produce more to extirpate poverty.

1. Prp. patikam (pkm) 9 of the 7th pattu mentions Cera Selvakatunko's gift to Kapilar as brahmadaya. It also refers to the gift of Okañtur to the brahmanas by the same donor. Pkm of the 2nd pattu alludes to Imayavarampan's gift of Annur (this cannot be five hundred villages as is often taken) to Kumañtur Kañnanar.


3. Tkl. 1033, 1035, 1040, 1065 etc.

4. Tkl. 1060, 1064 etc.

5. Tkl. 1041-1050.
They demand loyalty from the tillers and managerial competence from the masters of lands and good conduct from both. Directly and indirectly there are allusions to the indispensability of the tillers' subordination to their masters for the progress of agriculture. A prudent king capable of protecting the agriculturists is desired and idealised in this class of poems. The ideas of Gavaiyirum, nonagriculture, and muturol哳yam turned song of Po
writ large in the Kilkanheld song. Certain passages of Tulkanam allude to the ideas and institutions of a later stage of the social formation. It contains references to a social system of well estab-
lished relations of production institutionalised by the caste system. Obviously such stanzas were later interpolations.

The emergence of ethical literature and its emphasis on peace, good conduct and hard work point to a period which badly needed such attributes. The period was characterised by the collisions of the antagonistic elements in contemporary material culture. The conflicts between the agrarian tracts and non-agrarian tracts had become

1. Thil. 731, "tollavilumiyum tollum". Hero tollum means a body of competent men, i.e., an effective managerial group. See Natarajan, R. Economic Ideas of Tiruvelliyar (Madras, 1975) pp. 36-37.
2. Thil. 1033, 1039 etc.
3. Thil. 760
4. Tol. 625 ff.
aggravated. Predatory marches, large scale migrations, redistribution of land and the entailing break down of kinship-ties pushed the society into a crisis. The closing years of the fifth century A.D. witnessed the climax of the crisis generated by the Kalabhra aggression. The ruling lineages of Tamilakam were dethroned by the Kalabhra, who were to be nomadic warrior clans of the uplands of the Karnataka border. Vindhyavinicayya, a Buddhist work in Pāli says that certain Achuta Vikrānta of Kalabhra-kula was ruling when it was written. The period witnessed the in-flow of numerous groups of Buddhist and Jain following.

It is significant to note that the main targets of the Kalabhra were the agrarian settlements headed by the brahmanas. The early copper plates of the Chālukyas of Bāḍāmi, the Pallavas and the Pandyas allude to the dislocation of brahmana house-holds and their gift lands. Many of the ēkabhōga-brahnadāvam lost their privileges and the brahmanas had to flee in the wake of aggression. The general chaos and


the threat to their land reminded brahmanas of the Kali Age. The early copper plates of the Pallavas and the Pandyas use the term Kali for the evil attributes of the Kalabhra period since they were typical of Kaliyuga. However this marked only a temporary set back in the brahmana headed household economy. As the brahmadya mode of agrarian organisation was the successful alternative to the dissolving anterior modes, the crisis only caused a more vigorous reconstitution of the system. It could soon provide the material basis for the development of territorial states and a kingship devoid of clan nexus in Tamilakam. The material basis of the warrior power of the Pallava king Simhavishnu and the Pandya king Kaṭunkōn who put down the Kalabhra must be mainly the surplus of the brahmana headed household economy.

The most significant development after the subsidence of the social crisis was the proliferation of the brahmadyas which has been discussed in detail in the following chapter. They were of the corporate groups of the brahmanas rather than of their individual households. Some of the copper plates of the later period, mentioning the

1. The thoughts on the historical context of the Kali Age have been formulated in Sharma, R.S. "The Kali Age: A Period of Social Crisis" (IHC) (Hyderabad, 1978). Also Yadava, B.N.S. "The Accounts of the Kali Age and the Social Transition from the Antiquity to the Middle Ages" IHR, Vol. V, Nos. 1 & 2.

2. Explanation of the Kali Age as a transitional crisis has been considered applicable only to the heartland of the country. Jha, D.N. Presidential Address. IHC. (Waltair, 1979). But the thoughts are quite relevant to the question of transition from ancient to medieval in South Indian history also. The Vellikkuṭi plates call the Kalabhra ruler Kali-aracan. Plate iv, reverse, L.40. The Vaigai bed inscription of Cēndan Arikesari of the 7th century A.D says that the ruler surmounted the Kali through the mahadānas. "mahadānangalāi kalikaṭintu". E.I.xxxviii, Pt.1, No.4. p. 32.
previous history of the gift village show that the ēkabhōga-brahmā-
dēyas lost in the days of turmoil were restored as corporate brahmana
villages. The shift from ēkabhōga-brahmādēyas to corporate brahma-
dēyas illustrates the vigorous reconstitution of the new mode of
agrarian organisation initiated by the brahmana house-holds. Unlike
the house-hold economy the corporate brahmadēya mode was capable of
dominating the old modes by entering into relations with them in the
processes of production. Now the period also witnessed the emergence
of temples as landed institutions often as the nuclei of the brahmana
corporations. The śaivite and vaishnāvite bhakti hymns of the cano-
nical literature show the gradual emergence of temples as the centres
of brahmana headed agrarian villages. The bhakti hymns contained
a more popular and effective social morality initiated by the Śik-
kanakku literature. This is a clear evidence of the representation
of the emerging new social relations of production in the ideological
superstructure.

Here the genesis of a new social formation becomes complete.
But its various institutional and organisational constituents were
yet to take shape. Its political sanction through the new ruling
lineages and its ideological sanction through the cult of bhakti ac-
quired greater dimensions later on. Its division of labour tied up with
the institution of caste grew into a complex structure only later.

1. This has been discussed in Kesavan, V. "The Temple Base of the
Bhakti Movement in South India" IHC (Waltaire, 1979) pp.186 ff.
The processes of these developments involving a period of about three centuries from the 7th century A.D. onwards in the Pandyan region form the subject matter for the ensuing chapters.